

13 THE MEDI-EVAL BACKGROUND

statutes and proclamations and prerogative
courts, there
lurked ,th^mi»utabJ^aEEeJ^e^of the
economic man.
Tliere is an* evolution of
^iffeasr~2&^
of
organisms, and the quality of civilization
depends, as
Professor Wallas has so convincingly
shown, on the
transmission, less of physical qualities, than
of a com-
plex structure of habits, knowledge, and
beliefs, the
I destruction of which 'would be
"followed""witTnfTa year
; by the death of half the human race.
Granted that
the groundwork"of"inheriteS"dispositions
with which
the individual is born has altered little in
recorded
history, the interests and values which
compose his
world have undergone a succession
of revolutions.
The conventional statement that human
nature does
not change is plausible only so long as
attention is
focussed on those aspects of it which are
least dis-
tinctively human. The wolf is to-day
what he was
when he was hunted by Njmrpd. But,
while men are
born with many of fKe
cKaracteristics,J^f^wolves, man
is a wolf domesticated, who both
transmits the arts
by whiclfhe has-been parti^^ Jgjnfi4 and
improves
upon them. He steps into a social
inheritance, to
which each generation adds its
own contribution
of good and evil, before it
bequeathes it to its
successors.

There is a moral and religious, as well as a material, environment, which sets its stamp on the individual, even when he is least conscious of it. And the effect of changes in this environment is not less profound.

The economic categories of modern society, such as property, freedom of contract and competition, are as much a part of its intellectual furniture as its political conceptions, and, together with religion, have probably been the most potent force in giving it its character.

Between the conception of society as a community of unequal classes with varying functions, organized for a common end, and that which regards it as a mechanism adjusting itself through the play of econo-